

OVERVIEW AND HISTORY OF LANDFILL SITES  
MILLINGTON, NEW JERSEY

Fred C. Hart Associates a nationally known environmental engineering firm working under the guidance of the Environmental Protection Agency, has begun a detailed evaluation of four landfill sites in and around Millington, New Jersey. The evaluation will determine what should be done to assure the long term protection of the public from asbestos and materials containing asbestos which were disposed of at the sites over a long period of time.

The study is taking place under an agreement between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Gypsum Company of Dallas, Texas, under the national "Superfund" program. The sites are next to or close by a former National Gypsum plant in Millington at which the company produced asbestos roofing and siding between 1953 and 1975.

At one of the sites, there is a hill formed by loose asbestos and covered with vegetation. At the other sites, there appear to be only fragments of siding and roofing containing asbestos. There may also be a small amount of residue from a paint solvent at one of the sites.

The study is designed to determine the best process to use to remedy the situation. Testing will last about a year including extensive step-by-step review of the work by EPA. It will involve taking soil, water and air samples and testing them for asbestos fibers and residues from the paint solvent.

Based on all information currently available, the landfill sites appear to pose no immediate threat to the health of residents living in the Millington area--including those immediately adjacent to the sites.

Asbestos can pose a health hazard if fibers are inhaled, but most of the asbestos in the Millington area is underground. Since asbestos is a fiber and not a liquid it generally does not move or spread into ground water and is easily filtered from surface water. The paint solvent can cause irritation only if it comes into direct contact with the skin.

EPA is working closely with the National Gypsum on the study to assure that no future releases of asbestos fiber can develop from erosion of soil or a related process.

The purpose of this document is to explain why the study is taking place, the history of the sites, the process to be used to determine whether a clean up activity will be needed, and what the residents of Millington can expect.

### Superfund

In 1980 Congress established the Superfund to pay for the cleanup of abandoned waste sites, and to allow the government to recover cleanup costs from those responsible for the sites.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was given the responsibility for evaluating and designating the sites that should be considered for "priority" cleanup. These were sites from which there was a release or a threat of release of any one of the several hundred substances listed as hazardous or toxic by EPA under any of five major federal environmental statutes.

In December 1982, the landfill at the site of the former National Gypsum plant and three landfill sites in and near Millington were placed on the Superfund National Priorities List by EPA. They are listed by EPA as one site.

The main site was used for disposal of asbestos and small amounts of phenylmercuric acetate (paint solvent).

The three satellite sites, located within a four-mile radius of Millington, appear to contain broken pieces of asbestos roofing and siding shingles.

The Main Site

The main site, on Division Avenue, consists of approximately 11 acres with 450 ft. bordering the Passaic River. Now owned by TIFA, Ltd., the old national Gypsum plant has been divided into several smaller parts and leased to other manufacturing and service companies.

The plant was built in Millington in 1927 by Asbestos, Ltd., which engaged in the fiberization and sale of asbestos.

From 1946 until 1953, the plant was owned by Bernard E. Smith and operated under the name of Smith Asbestos, Inc., a manufacturer of asbestos roofing and siding. (This company no longer is in business.)

During this time, water from the manufacturing process was impounded on the site by dams constructed to permit settling of asbestos fibers suspended in the waste water. Periodically the sediment from the settling ponds was removed, transferred to the adjacent waste site and covered with dirt.

In May 1953, the property was acquired by National Gypsum Company, which manufactured asbestos siding and roofing sheets there until 1975. During National Gypsum's period of ownership the waste generated from the production of these

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materials was recaptured and recycled, with only a small amount remaining for disposal.

Waste that was not recycled -- essentially broken siding in which asbestos was embedded in a cement-like product -- was transported off-site to the three satellite locations by independent contractors and/or individuals.

From 1959 until 1972, National Gypsum used phenylmercuric acetate (PMA) as a paint solvent in the materials used for coating the asbestos shingles. A small pit at the main site was used for discharge material generated by cleaning of coating equipment. From recollections of employees of National Gypsum at that time, it is estimated that only 7.2 to 14.4 pounds of PMA was placed in this pit each year.

In May 1975, National Gypsum closed the Millington plant. Ownership of the land was transferred to TIFA, Ltd., on June 1, 1978.

#### Satellite Sites

The three additional sites, located within a four-mile radius of Millington, are:

- A landfill located along a trail in what is now the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (designated as a refuge after the site was no longer being used as a landfill).
- Privately owned property at New Vernon Road in Meyersville.
- Privately owned property at 651 White Bridge Road, Meyersville.

In the case of all three sites, broken fragments of roofing and siding were apparently used to fill in low spots or dumped by local private contractors and others.

#### Why the Study is Needed

None of the four sites appears to present a significant public health problem. EPA and National Gypsum are concerned, however, about the potential for long-term problems.

*Removal  
Evaluation*

At the main site, the concern is that if soil covering the asbesto erodes, asbestos fibers could escape into the air or surface water. The concern over PMA is whether there is any possibility that residues could eventually escape into the groundwater.

The three satellite sites will be tested to determine whether there is a possibility of asbestos fibers being released from crumbling asbestos shingle fragments used as fill.

National Gypsum regards these possible concerns as remote, but it believes that further evaluation is needed to assure that no health hazards develop in the future and that measures be taken now to clean up the sites if necessary.

#### The Study

Testing of the four sites will determine what hazardous materials are at the sites and to develop alternative methods to remedy the situation.

The study of the four sites will be undertaken by a professional engineering firm, Fred C. Hart and Associates, Inc., New York, N.Y. It will test the soil and water to see whether any possible runoff from the buried asbestos at the main site could contaminate the Passaic River or the surrounding air.

These tests will be closely monitored by the EPA. Additionally, soil and water will be tested for any PMA residue. The three satellite sites also will be tested to see if wind-blown particles can get into the air.

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The Next Steps

The site operations plan developed by Fred C. Hart and Associates has been approved by the EPA. It will take several months to conclude all the tests. When they are completed, Fred C. Hart Associates will develop recommendations and, if necessary, plans for assuring that there will be no release of hazardous material over the long-term at any of the sites.

When the study results are completed and recommendations developed, all the people in the Millington area who will have an opportunity to comment on them. Special briefings will be held for local and state officials.

Comments on the study will be solicited from the public as well as the officials and will be taken into account by EPA in determining whether any further activity is needed to clean up the sites.

If any remedial action is deemed necessary, it will take about a year to develop the plans. These, too, will be shared with the public before any action is undertaken.

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Impact of the Present Testing

The testing of the soil, water and air in the area will pose no threat to local citizens. Great care will be taken by the workers during the tests to prevent asbestos particles from escaping into the air. The air will be monitored by the Fred C. Hart Associates and the workers conducting the tests will wear protective clothing and respirators to assure that they do not inhale any asbestos particles.

Working closely with EPA, National Gypsum has taken responsibility, as the only former owner of the site still in business, for the evaluation, as well as for notifying local residents of the details of the study. If the study indicates the need for remedial action, National Gypsum will continue to work with the EPA, state and local officials, and the community to ensure the safety of the environment.